

FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB OF BALLARAT

EXCURSION / NEWS SHEET

SEPTEMBER, 1980

Meeting ..SEPTEMBER 5 - "The Use of Hollows by Mammals and Birds" -
Mr. B. Golding.

MeetingOCTOBER 3 - "Butterflies" - Mr. D. Crosbie.

Excursion ..SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 7 - Full Day - "Mosquito Flat" - leader
Dr. F. Harrap.

Excursion ..SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 20 - Full Day - Enfield Forest -
Leader Mr. E. Bedggood.



PORCUPINE GRASS



BLACK SHOULDERS KITE

SIGHTED AT W.V.F.N.C.A CAMPOUT AT WOOD WOOD

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Meetings, as specified, are held in the Administration Building of the School of Mines and Industries, Lydiard Street South, Ballarat, commencing 8 pm.

EXCURSIONS, AS SPECIFIED, COMMENCE FROM CROCKERS, Cnr. STURT and ARMSTRONG STREETS, BALLARAT, AT 9.30 am FOR FULL DAY OUTINGS, OR AT 1.30 pm FOR HALF DAY.

W.V.F.N.C.A. CAMP OUT - MARYBOROUGH

OCTOBER 11-12 1980

PROGRAMME

Saturday, 11th October

- 10.00 a.m. Meet at Caravan Park to collect name tags, car stickers and detailed programmes.
- 10.30 a.m. Depart for excursion to local bush.
- 1.30 p.m. Depart on excursions from Civic Square outside Post Office. Choice: (a) Bird Watching,
(b) Local Wildflowers.
- 5.00 p.m. Tea at Church of England Parish Hall Foyer. Cups of tea or coffee will be served by Maryborough Club.
- 6.30 p.m. Annual and General Meeting of W.V.F.N.C.A. at Anglican Hall, Clarendon Street.
- 7.45 p.m. Official launching of Cliff Beauglehole's book VICTORIAN VASCULAR PLANTS CHECKLISTS by E.G. (Ted) Errey.
- 8.15 p.m. Guest Speaker: Mr. Alan Hartup.

Sunday 12th October

- 9.30 a.m. Leave from Civic Square for local bush tour. Lunch will be a picnic/barbeque near Big Reef, Amhurst. Boiling water and a barbeque set up will be provided by the host club.
- 3.30 p.m. Return to lunch site for Afternoon Tea. Hosts Maryborough Club, but please bring your own cups.

WOOD WOOD CAMP-OUT, AUGUST 15TH - 17TH

Members from all over Western Victoria arrived at Wood Wood on either the Friday night or Saturday morning. Saturday morning was spent at leisure, either exploring Nyah forest, looking for small birds in Wood Wood Reserve or wandering along the Murray where a Spotless Crake was sighted.

We spent the afternoon at Towan Plains, shallow salt pans which were at that time devoid of any water birds, probably because of the high salt content of the water. Our leader for the afternoon, Bert Curtis (Mid-Murray), told us how the pans were formed and that the knobs that surrounded them were formed by a build up of sand being blown off the pan, and that they were a good place for finding gypsum crystals.

After a freezingly cold night we set off north to the mallee scrub where we looked around an old homestead site with a small area of cleared land which was being gradually reclaimed by the scrub. Then we moved on to the Wandown State Reserve which had quite different scrub, a lot thicker, and quite easy to get lost in because of its sameness. We were shown a Mallee Fowl's nest which was unused at the time because, as we were told, the fowl is waiting for rain to make the mound of vegetation start to rot and produce heat. The bird lays its eggs at intervals, the first chick hatching at about the same time as the last one is being laid. After the chicks hatch they are left to fend for themselves.

Heading back through the park we stopped for the flower watchers and found a patch of green-hoods on the south side of a sand dune (out of the sun).

On the way back there was some drama as some of us had trouble driving over a dune where the road consisted of soft sand, though we managed to get back to Ballarat all right.

Jonathan Hawley.

C.C.V. re RIVER IMPROVEMENT TRUSTS

The C.C.V. regards the performance of this Trust to have been lamentable, and will be making a written submission, through its River Improvement Expert, Reg Johnson, to the Public Bodies Review Committee.

However, there will be a LOCAL hearing at Ballarat on September 19. The C.C.V. suggests that the public attend, and if they can, give evidence. Anyone who requires assistance with evidence is invited to contact the Council.

Their letter will be tabled at tonight's meeting.

The main items of general interest were :

1. Mid Murray F.N. concern for the survival of the Freckled Duck.
A letter is to be sent to appropriate authorities requesting that penal conditions should be stringently enforced during the duck season and that areas where large numbers of the Freckled Duck congregate should be closed during the season, and strictly policed.
2. Save the Heathland Committee - the problem of siting the Aluminium Smelter at Portland.
Cliff Beauglehole reported on developments and invited individuals to tour the area at the end of this month.
3. Report on A.C. Beauglehole Trust.
\$560 has been passed on from Kingston Tours to the Publishing Fund. Also announced was the imminent publishing of the Checklist of Flora of Victoria, also that the Alpine and Gippsland studies are in preparation with N.E., and Melbourne studies are being prepared in the future.
4. Next camp-out at Maryborough - October 11-12.

Two fascinating sets of slides were shown after the meeting. The first from Bert Curtis gave observations on the mating and nesting of emus and the second set included the preparation of a mallee fowl mound and the subsequent egg laying.

THE ORANGE-BELLIED PARROT - *Neophema Chrysogaster*

Fellow member, Charles Anderson, gave a detailed lecture about this little parrot at our August meeting. He illustrated his talk with slides, which prepared us for our Ballarat Club's excursion the next Sunday.

- Because this bird is the rarest parrot in the world, the World Wildlife Fund has it as its top project. Ninety birds have been counted with the help of B.O.C's and Field Naturalist Clubs of Geelong and Warrnambool as well as the Parks and Wildlife in Tasmania. Some ten years ago the parrot was seen to be breeding in the Coorong; sightings have been in Western Port and Port Fairy as well as the site that the Ballarat Club visited on Swan Island. At The Spit, the orange-bellied parrot lives in a fragile strip of salt marsh surrounded by a commonwealth explosive bunker and Avalon Air Field. To add to the predicament of this delicate
- 4.

situation, further industrial development is planned on this site. This parrot is known to drink water and with more industrial activity in the vicinity, there is great concern that the extra water demands for industry could not only change the water level but also affect the water temperature.

Some characteristics of this bird still puzzle observers. It is seen in groups as it feeds when more males are present than females. One bird acts as a sentry for the flock, perching on a vantage point some 6 feet high. (It is often difficult to distinguish between the turquoise parrot and the orange-bellied parrot when the birds are feeding - in flight, or if the guard parrot is in good viewing position the orange belly can be easily seen).

The parrot is seen during the morning, but no-one knows its destination after that. Observers of this bird are also unsure of the reason for the stability in numbers. Banding has not been possible as it is considered undesirable for this already endangered species. Consequently exact movements are not clear. It is known to breed in S.W. Tasmania and migrate to Victoria in March returning in September to breed again.

Ray Schultz gave the vote of thanks and in so doing asked why it is that such a beautiful little parrot has not a name more in keeping with its beauty.

Margaret Tonkin.

SWAN ISLAND - 3RD AUGUST

The day's weather co-operated with some cloud, little rain and some wind, and there were no problems with the military guard allowing the party onto the island.

Initially, various bird species were noted and then the party split into three smaller groups. Each group had an observer who had seen the Orange-bellied parrot before. The parties set out to cover the salt marsh in the S-W corner of the island which the parrot normally frequents.

About 14 parrots were seen in the salt marsh in groups of 5-6, and 2. Their alarm call was still the rapid "zztt - zztt - zztt" metallic buzzing much like an agitated budgie. Perhaps due to the wind or some other factor, the parrots seemed not to be feeding and soon flew off en masse to the East and out of sight.

After lunch, the same area was covered and a group of about 5 - 6 parrots again was sighted. They still were not feeding to any extent but mainly undertaking flying and perching behaviour.

Proceeding South we came onto the fairway where several more parrots were seen happily feeding and ignoring golfers passing by. Of course, when we tried to photograph them we couldn't get as close as the golfers.

One interesting observation was that the male and female were both very bright in colour. Recently, in talking with Richard Loyn, the Victorian co-ordinator of the World Wildlife Fund Study, he indicated that they were encountering the same phenomenon with some birds and yet others were of a "brownish" shade. Perhaps they represent some dietary differences, hybrids, immatures - who knows?

He also indicated that the total number of the species may be about 125 with 30 in South Australia. About 3 have been sighted at Jack Smith Lake for the first time and about 76 at The Spit at one time.

Very interestingly, about 40 immatures out of 60 - 70 birds were seen in N-W Tasmania, yet only 15 of them detected here. Perhaps it is technique or luck in determining juveniles. A very well designed pamphlet is available from W.W.F. for Neophema parrots through Richard on 03-755 1003 (B.H.) or -968 3370 (A.H.), or Lot 202 Monbulk Rd., EMERALD, Vic. 3782, when anyone wishes to make further investigations.

The intriguing question still is "why is the population so low and not increasing?" Perhaps, as suggested at the meeting, it is some man-made chemical affecting behaviour or some other ecological aspect of the bird. This question really must be answered before Pt. Wilson is developed.

The day ended well with 13 parrots being observed and photographed feeding on the grass (?) of the 9th fairway. Samples of this material were taken for identification. Could anyone with good close ups of the parrot or a possible new common name please let

me know. I hope that having seen the bird the suggestion to have it named "Emerald Parrot" may have some support.

It was most unusual and fortunate to be able to see and approach a black shouldered kite eating a mouse after the main group had passed. Thanks to those with the keen eyes who spotted skeletal remains which will aid in the ecological survey of the island. Any future bird or other fauna or habitat location recordings will be most appreciated.

C. Anderson.

SWAN ISLAND BIRD LIST 3.8.80

Orange-bellied Parrot	Wagtail
Bar Tailed Godwit	Spiney Cheeked Honeyeater
Little Pied Commorant	Mistletoe bird
Little Grebe	Yellow tailed Thornbill
Pacific Gull	Striated Thornbill
Fairy Tern	Magpie
Silver Gull	White Fronted Chat
Pelican	Pipit
Royal Spoonbill	Sky lark
Yellow Spoonbill	Kestrel
White Ibis	Horsfield Bronze Cuckoo
Straw Necked Ibis	Fantailed Cuckoo
White-faced Heron	Superb Blue Wren
Black Swan	Black Shouldered Kite
Spur Winged Plover	Pied Oyster-catcher
Eastern Curlew	Red-necked Stint
Welcome Swallow	White Egret
Grey Fantail	

COPY OF LETTER FROM MR. J.R. CHANNON, SOUTH WESTERN DIVISIONAL
FORESTER

"Your members will be pleased to know that the matter of providing a replacement for the 3.33 ha of Reserved Forest now occupied by the Mt. Clear Technical/High School has been finalized by the purchase of part of allotments 114 and 123 in the Parish of Glendaruel. This land, of approximately 6 ha, adjoins the Mt. Beckworth forest and approximates the area inspected by some members of your Club in either late 1977 or early 1978.

The area is irregularly shaped because, with the co-operation of the vendor, the boundary has been so located to include a piece of land on which both the red and greenish flowered forms of *Correa reflexa* occur.

You will be aware that in the recently published Proposed Recommendations for the North Central Study Area the Land Conservation Council recommends that Mt. Beckworth, with the exception of the existing softwood plantations, be set aside as a Scenic Reserve under the management of the Forests Commission. It is reasonable to assume that the 6 ha just purchased will in due course be officially added to the Reserve."

A new member, Mrs. G. Low, was welcomed at the August meeting. We wish her a long and happy association with the Club.
